

The things we carry and the no-fur raccoon

I know this my house cause I pee over the number and I pee over the number cause the bitch up the street pee over the number and I pee on her pee. Master not like this. “Come on, Charlie. Heel boy,” he say, and pull on my leash. But Master not smart. Five years he have me, and still he not know I am my own dog.

The bitch’s pee and my pee still over the number, but the house gone, the trees black sticks. It smell like when Master hide a smoke in the garage. His bitch not like this. “Please, tell me you haven’t been smoking. We’ve talked about this.” Master say no, but it a lie. I guess he his own dog too.

The bitch’s pee under my pee in front of my house no longer there smell good like she get into the trash, lucky, lucky. At our house only racoons get into the trash. Master hate them. “Hey! Hey you!” he yell. I run outside and bark but racoons only growl and show me teeth and wave claws that open cans. Trash cans. I want some of those.

“Charlie, get in here!” Master’s bitch shout. “Get him in here! Racoons killed my sister’s cat when we were kids. They’re vicious things.” I hear this and think, Hey lady, I ain’t no cat.

They say dogs see no color, but I say, ha! My bowl is red, my ball is yellow, my leash is blue, my bed is brown, not that I ever sleep in it. My bowl and my ball and my leash and my bed and Master’s bed, which really my bed, they in there, somewhere in the gray. I pace in front of my house that not there and whine.

To walk in the gray is to walk in hurt.

My belly say, “Eat, Charlie!” But I say, “What? Black tree sticks?” I want to hump something. Bad. A pillow, a leg, the bitch down the street. Master’s bitch not like it when I

hump. “Why is Charlie always humping everything? For god’s sake, you had his balls cut off.” Humping feel good and I know she like it too. I always mad when Master kick me off the bed.

But Master’s bitch not all bad. When the sky turn orange and it stink like cigarettes and I shake and whine like I never stop, she say, “It’s ok, Charlie. It’s ok.” She carry me to her car, but it hot outside and lights and screaming cars everywhere. I jump out of her arms and run.

“Charlie, get back here! Charlie!”

I hear her and I hear Master but I run and I run and I run like my leg runs theyselves.

In the hills, between two trees, something move in the bush. A raccoon. I know it a raccoon cause it smell like a raccoon but it have no fur like it never have fur cause I could smell it if it burnt. Pink skin, black claws, black dots on its back and face. It a boy not a bitch, I know, cause dogs can smell all balls.

The no-fur raccoon stare at me like I a cat and it know what to do and I stare at it like I a dog and I know what to do. Stare and stare and stare. But the world a hot orange ball and I not a dog, not now. I lay down and put my nose next to no-fur raccoon and no-fur raccoon growl like maybe I a cat after all. But it don’t move. It put a black claw on my head, not to hurt, more like petting.

Sleep. A long time sleep. I waked up and it day but the world dark. Two trees still there but orange ball gone. No-fur raccoon gone. I curl up and sleep. Wake up and the world less dark. Start to walk. I find no-fur raccoon down the hill. One black claw still there, but the rest smoking bones. I pee on it not cause I want to, not cause I happy no-fur raccoon only smoking bones, but cause I sad.

The ground hot. It hurt my paws. But I walk.

I find my house that not my house and curl up on sidewalk smelling my pee and the bitch up the street's pee, waiting, waiting, waiting.

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Dear Michael,

You would have gotten a kick out of things, as perverse as that is. Me, strangers, our neighbors, who are also strangers, all huddled together on the bleachers of the make-shift shelter at Windsor High School waiting for the fireman to tell us the state of things. The fireman looked crazy young. Like a bird that just lost the last of its down, I swear to god.

“I’m sorry to inform you folks that none of the houses in the area were spared.”

Do you remember Pamela Marshall? She wrote that note asking us to kindly consider better keeping up our yard in the name of good neighborliness. I said, “I’m supposed to kill my back pulling weeds because some dried-up WASP with environmental sensitivities and absolutely no chin at all thinks I should? Well, sorry Pamela, no can do.”

And you said, “It wouldn’t hurt you to be nice you know.” We got in a fight about it. It all seems so meaningless now. Petty on both sides, that is, mine and hers.

When Mr. Baby Fat Fireman told us our houses were gone, Pamela Marshall started to scream. Her son put his arm around her. “Mom, please stop. This isn’t helping.” Later, I heard him tell her, “We have to remember what we lost were only things.”

Only things, Michael. Do you agree?

We live our lives on a grid, each square plot planned out in an office, each house carefully built, at least they were back then. And now every single one is gone.

On Maple, I drove past a family standing in the middle of what was once their home, holding hands in prayer. What could they be praying about amongst the twisted metal, the melted appliances, the dilapidated chimney, on the ashes of the taken?

Fuck you, God. Fuck you very much.

Fuck you too, Michael, by the way.

The inside of a furnace. It must smell like this. My head hurts and my lungs burn. “We advise you to stay out of the area for the next 36 hours,” Mr. Baby Fat Fireman told us. Advise, but not forbid.

The Tubbs Fire. What kind of name is that? People who’ve lost everything in a hurricane can say, Katrina did this to us, or, That was my life after Andrew. Would it help if I could blame this on Mia or Craig?

Fuck you, Michael. Fuck you for dying before any of this happened. Fuck you for making me too numb to feel.

Who dies of an aneurysm, anyway? Those who do, don’t do it at Whole Foods. When I collected your things, they handed me a paper bag with coconut oil, environmentally friendly tile cleaner, sea salt, a melted tub of organic mint chocolate chip ice cream, Propolis & Myrrh Gingermint Baking Soda Tom’s of Maine. Mine now. You had already paid.

What things would you carry out of a burning house? Did I ever ask you that question? If I did, you probably gave the usual answers, with a few personal items added in. But what you didn’t know is that fire comes quick. I only had time to grab some clothes, my phone, a few odds and ends. And your ashes. Ashes from a fire. The world is ridiculous.

Our neighbor’s dog is lying in front of what used to be their house. Charlie. That’s his name, right? I think he’s dead.

“I’m pretty sure that dog hates our neighbor’s new girlfriend,” I told you. The one who moved in quick.

“Don’t dogs like everyone?” you answered.

“I think you’re talking about yourself.”

This time we laughed, I remember that.

I get out of my car and walk over to Charlie. The pads on his paws are blistered. His fur is singed in places. But he’s breathing. I put my hand on his chest and he looks up like, *What took you so long?*

I put him in the car, your ashes in a box at his feet. I’ll find our neighbor’s number. *You haven’t lost Charlie, I’ll tell him. You haven’t lost him.*

But not yet.

Right now, all I want to do is drive to the ocean and watch the white waves break against black rocks with Charlie beside me, licking his wounds. And you’ll be with us too, dust in a box, there but not there.

I miss you.

Love,

Meg